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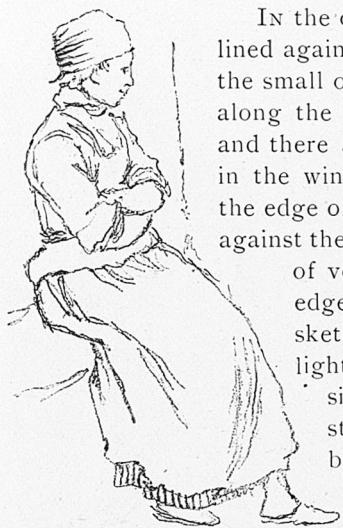
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PEASANT AND PICTURE

BY GEORGE WHARTON EDWARDS.

With original illustrations by the writer.

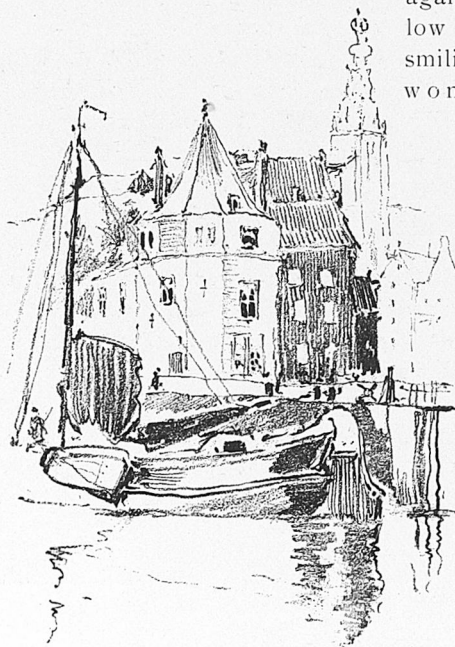


In the clear dusk that was upon the dike I saw her first outlined against the dark mass of the village church. The roofs of the small one-storied peasant houses that lined the crooked way along the dike were blurred against the tender sky, and here and there a thorn-bush showed its ivory-like blossoms, shaking in the wind. The tiny pools of water beneath the willows at the edge of the polder were yellow as topaz. Swallows whirled against the light and skimmed the eaves, and there was the sound of voices and laughing from a group of peasants at the edge of the sea. I was sketching with the last light, and a maid stood beside me, her cap ends stiffly starched and blown coyly back at her temples, where gleamed two shining plates of gilded silver marking the head-dress of Breskens. Across her bosom lay a kerchief, its ends tucked cunningly between the buttons at her waist, and her skirts were ample and of a blue woolen stuff. Her arms were bare to above the elbow and were burned brown by the sun. There she stood against the yellow of the sky, smiling down in wonder at my

rapid brush strokes. The wind blew salt from the sea, and from the inbound boats, blunt bowed, lee boarded, and brown sailed, came clinking of chain and rattle of block, in harmony with the softened voices of the fishermen. "Stand thee well before me, little Misje," I said in her tongue, "and I will give thee a silver gulden for thy pains." At which her eyes twinkled, the gilt ornaments above them gleamed in the light, and she became part of my picture.

"Who is thy father, little maid?"

"My father was Stornik Appel," she said, "and one day he went forth in his boat from the dike end, upon the early





From a painting by George Wharton Edwards.

"ALL IN THE CLEAR LIGHT SHE POSED."

tide. It was the herring season, and the storm came up, the great storm of '87—the Heer will remember, perhaps. The wind blew, the water swept the dikes, and his boat came never back from the sea. So all that night and day did the bells ring at Breskens, at Vyle Vliet, at Hoornen, and even Huisdyk. Thus were forty boats lost, and thus I am an orphan it is now six years since. My name is Lotje Appel, and of brothers I have two, Jan and Arrie. 'Twas Jan that brought thee here before yestereen in his boat from Hoornen."

The light failed fast, and from the harbor reach came forth twinkling flashes from the beacon light, that broke into dancing ruddy sparks at the wet edges of the dike stones.

I packed my box with moist uncleaned palette and brushes, and my easel in its convenient straps, while the maid tightly gripped a silver gulden as we parted, she to come to me at early day for a fresh pose indoors.

Days passed; as I painted I had no thought of time, and my picture grew. Sitting in the wide window-seat, against fresh lawn curtains, all in the clear light, she posed while I sought the solution of the problem of tone I had set against my hand's cunning, and it availed me much that she truly kept her pose.



respectfully leave their clumsy wooden klumpjes (shoes) at the doorstone, and doff the hat as they entered, and I knew of their presence only by their heavy breathing or a chance whispered criticism of the picture, so quiet and considerate were they as they watched its growth. Thus and so the picture grew and was finished, and the reason of my stay among them was at an end.

So one morning I came away from Breskens, when the wind blew fresh, the gulls flew high, the tawny yellow waters of the sea were tumbling and tossing, and the white-caps showed far out, while the few boats the harbor sheltered were nodding in a line, all headed to the westward, tugging at their moorings. My luggage was snugly stowed in Appel's blunt-bowed tjalk. I had said farewell to little Lotje and the villagers, of whom some had a hand-grasp and God-speed for me; the red roofs of Breskens and the pier head where the peasants had foregathered in my honor became blurred in the distance, and Appel held the tiller in his strong hand as the tjalk, well heeled over and her brown sails rounded out, bounded away for the distant shore.

